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### Broadening and deepening the debate about police reform in Scotland

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## **Introduction: broadening and deepening the debate about police reform in Scotland**

The 2012 Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act brought about some of the most radical public sector reforms for a generation and, by establishing a national police force, arguably the biggest change to the policing of Scotland since the nineteenth century. The drivers behind these changes were partly economic (given the deep cuts to public spending that have occurred in recent years), partly political (given the need to address an increasingly complex landscape of police governance and accountability) and partly organisational (given the challenge of developing Scotland's capacity and capability around the increasing threats posed by new forms of transnational criminality, organised crime and terrorism). In the two years since Police Scotland was established, however, contrasting narratives about the impacts of reform have emerged. On the one hand, there have been a wide range of significant achievements in terms of forming a new national police organisation from the merger of the legacy forces while also delivering large scale financial savings and doing so without any discernible change in overall public confidence in local policing. On the other hand, police reform has sparked a series of high profile and increasingly acrimonious political and media debates about the nature and politics of contemporary policing in Scotland. In part these debates have focused on issues of police governance and the relationships between the new Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland but attention has also focused on changes to the style of policing, exemplified by the controversies surrounding the increasing use of stop and search, the arming of police officers, and concerns about the emergence of a target driven culture.

It is against this background that this Special Issue of *Scottish Justice Matters* attempts to offer a set of broader and deeper reflections on the recent changes to policing in Scotland. A broader perspective comes from viewing Scottish police reform in a wider historical and geographical context. The contributions by Jackson and Murray, for example, remind us that debates about the structures, powers and values of policing in Scotland have a long and contested history, while the paper by Terpstra and the interview with Tomkins demonstrate that structural reforms to policing are a current feature of several other European jurisdictions. But while such macro-scale changes to policing are of considerable political and strategic importance, it is changes at the micro-level of routine police practices and interactions with the public that are arguably of greater significance in driving changes to police effectiveness and perceptions of police legitimacy. Many of the papers in this Special Issue reflect on these deeper aspects of changes to contemporary policing in Scotland. These range from studies of community engagement (Harkin) and rural policing (Wooff) to innovations in training and practice informed by the principles of procedural justice (Robertson and McMillan and McQueen and Bradford), to the development of toolkits that will allow police practitioners to mobilize evidence to support innovative change at a local level (Aston and Lum) to joint academic and practitioner reflections on evidence-based policing interventions to tackle crime and disorder (Eck and Royan).

Our own concluding observations to this Special Issue will further explore the broader context of police reform in Scotland but also highlight the opportunities that now exist to foster evidence-informed change and develop an approach to policing which is focused on prevention and on enhancing the trust and confidence of communities.

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Nick Fyfe and Alistair Henry are guest editors of this policing issue of SJM